



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road
Groton, CT 06340-4394
Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor James L. Streeter, Councilors Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Paulann H. Sheets, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, January 12, 2010

7:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Councilor Watson was elected Chairman pro tem and he called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Watson
Members Absent: Mayor Streeter

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2009-0327 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meeting of December 8, 2009 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Councilor O'Beirne noted that he had asked for an update on the status of 23 Library Street. There are people working on the site and people are asking questions. Town Manager Oefinger provided a brief update. The trial date is January 27th. No permits have been issued for any work other than demolition and clean up. The Town has not determined the nature of the work that is taking place. Ms. Chipperini has been asked to provide additional information and the issue will be raised on January 27th. The Town Manager believes that the deck is being repaired and that no foundation/concrete work is occurring.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2009-0324 FYE 2009 CAFR Presentation

Discussed

Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo, Town Treasurer Cindy Landry, and Vanessa Rossitto from Blum Shapiro were present to address the Council. Mr. Pandolfo noted the CAFR is required by the Charter and it has been an award-winning document for 15 years. There are three sections to the report: Introductory; Audit; and Statistical. This is the fifth year that Blum Shapiro has conducted the audit. Ms. Rossitto noted that Blum Shapiro has issued a clean or unqualified opinion, the highest form. She then reviewed the document in detail.

Councilor O'Beirne questioned the problems found with the Board of Education and Ms. Rossitto addressed the issues.

Mayor Streeter arrived at 7:17 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Watson

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0303 Appointment of Other Attorneys
Discussed

Town Attorney Eileen Duggan reviewed her recommendation for other attorney including for bond counsel and for the Board of Education. Councilor Watson asked about fees. Ms. Duggan noted that the fees for bond counsel vary. An effort has been made to keep fees down and there has been no significant change. The Board of Education attorney has indicated that the \$185 per hour could increase to \$225. Attorney O'Connell, the attorney the Town would use if Suisman Shapiro were not available, would use Suisman Shapiro's fee structure.

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2010-0005 Pending Litigation (2010 Standing Referral)

A motion was made by Mayor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Watson, that the members of the Town Council, Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Director of Administrative Services Douglas Ackerman, Manager of Human Resources Joyce Sauchuk and Attorney Eileen Duggan go into executive session at 7:28 p.m. pursuant to General Statutes Section 1-200 (6) (B) for the purpose of discussion related to a pending claim.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 8:10 p.m.

A motion was made by Mayor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to Recommend for Resolution the following:

WHEREAS, the Town of Groton Code of Ordinances, Division 2 - Retirement System of Chapter 2 - Administration of Article IV - Officer and Employees contains the following section:

Sec. 2-76 Amendments - Upon recommendation of the town manager retirement benefits for employees of the town covered by this division may be increased by resolution of the Town Council.

WHEREAS, the Town Manager recommends amendments to the Retirement Plan for Non-Union Employees of the Town of Groton as set forth in the attached 2010 Retirement Incentive Program Description for Non-Union Employees; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council has considered the recommendation of the Town Manager and the cost estimates provided by the Town's actuaries regarding the 2010 Retirement Incentive Program Description for Non-Union Employees, it is hereby

RESOLVED, that pursuant to the recommendation of the Town Manager, the Retirement Plan for Non-Union Employees of the Town of Groton is amended as set forth in the 2010 Retirement Incentive Program Description for Non-Union Employees.

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0314 Freedom of Information Act Presentation
Discussed

Town Attorney Mike Carey will be presenting a Freedom of Information seminar on January 20th at 8:30 a.m. at the Town Hall Annex. Councilors are invited to attend, or Mr. Carey is willing to

do another session perhaps as a special meeting at 6:00 p.m. before a regular Town Council meeting.

2009-0320**Probate Court Changes****Recommended for a Resolution**

Town Manager Mark Oefinger explained the requirement to consolidate the probate courts of Groton, Ledyard, Stonington and North Stonington. The entities need to choose a location for the regional court and by the end of March, the court must be named. In November, a judge will be elected for the region. The intent is to have the revised regional court system up and running by the beginning of next year. The First Selectmen or Mayors from the four towns will be meeting soon to discuss the issue. The Town Manager believes that the regional court should be located in Groton because Groton is the busiest and Town Hall is centrally located. However, the current Probate space is deficient. Templates from the state for an ideal set up suggest approximately 1300 to 1400 square feet of space will be needed. The only expansion possibility in Town Hall is into the Registrar of Voters space and possibly the hallway.

Judge Fred Palm addressed the Council and concurred that Groton should be the location of the consolidated court. The existing space for the court is inadequate and does not afford the level of privacy desired although the service and caring in Groton outweigh the inconvenience. Judge Palm described current and future space needs for the Court. He noted the regional children's court in New London that Groton has not needed to use because of the excellent youth services provided by the Town of Groton. Judge Palm is concerned that First Selectman Ed Habarek has expressed an interest in locating the regional court in Stonington.

Councilor Monteiro noted that she is familiar with all four of the courts. Given the number of people served, Groton is the best location and she would support keeping the regional court in Groton.

A motion was made by Councilor Monteiro, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to make every effort to keep the regional probate court within the Town of Groton.

Councilor Sheets suggested that the resolution include the Town promptly identifying an appropriate site for the regional court. Discussion followed on privacy concerns.

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0282**Supplemental Appropriation for Handicap Ramp at Spicer House****Recommended for a Resolution**

Director of Public Works Gary Schneider provided background information on this request. The chair lift was originally installed in 1990 and there has been an increasing number of incidents of it not functioning. Installation of a handicap ramp was considered as an alternative to replacing the lift, which is located at the rear of the building. Cost estimates for the 30' long concrete ramp with metal railings and a replacement front door are close to \$75,000 including a parking area and walkway. Approximately \$20,000 is available from previously appropriated funds for the lift replacement. Staff is requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$55,000 for the handicap ramp. Another alternative is to replace the lift, which would require an additional \$10,000. Mr. Schneider noted that lighting at the rear of the Spicer House is inadequate. All Town buildings are handicap accessible. A wooden ramp would be about \$10,000 less, but would require more maintenance than concrete and concrete matches the existing stoop.

Jerry Lokken, Manager of Recreation Services, explained that very few people use the lift because of its unreliability and its counterintuitive location at the rear of the building. A large number of disabled persons are involved in the Town's recreation programs. Currently, staff conducts transactions for handicapped individuals out in the parking lot. It was noted that the chair lift can not be operated without a staff member to turn it on.

Councilor O'Beirne expressed concern with the cost of the ramp. Mr. Schneider noted the estimate is based on a contractor doing the work, but the Town could do some of the work to save money.

Councilor Flax also expressed concern with the cost of the ramp, but also with the location of Parks and Recreation at the Spicer House. He suggested it may be time to consider moving Parks and Recreation to a more central location.

Mr. Schneider noted the two Spicer properties were deeded to the Town in the 1960s. Mr. Spicer's will requires that the property be used for a public park and recreation area, and if it is not, the property reverts to the Nature Conservancy. Mr. Schneider noted that all buildings require maintenance and upkeep. The Town Manager noted that the Town does not have available office space to relocate Parks and Recreation. Noank School will become available when the Senior Center leaves, William Seely will be transferred to the Town in the near future, and Fitch Middle School may be available in five or more years. Ideally, Parks and Recreation should be co-located with other Town services or programming, but neither option is possible at this time.

Councilor Monteiro also expressed concerned with the cost. Councilor Sheets agreed with Councilor Flax. She suggested that the new senior center would be a good base of operations for Parks and Recreation. Councilor Peruzzotti agreed.

Mayor Streeter noted that he was personally stuck in the lift recently. He feels that Spicer House is a beautiful building and the ramp will make it ugly. He expressed his preference for replacing the lift rather than building a ramp. Mayor Streeter agreed that the Parks and Recreation staff deserve better facilities.

Councilor Kolnaski feels it is a great location for Parks and Recreation. She feels it is difficult to drive around the back of the building and feels the ramp should be installed at the front of the building.

A motion was made by Councilor Monteiro, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to Recommend for Resolution a supplemental appropriation of \$10,000 to replace the chair lift.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 7 - Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Watson
Opposed: 2 - Councilor Kolnaski and Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

2009-0284

Judson Avenue Drainage

Discussed

Director of Public Works Gary Schneider reviewed the survey results. Sixteen responses out of 25 were received. Flooding occurs during heavy rain, even in houses with sump pumps. Public Works decided to expand the scope of the survey and distributed an additional 28 surveys. Mr. Schneider noted that these houses were built as part of a two phase subdivision in the early 1970s and early 1980s in an area of wetlands and gravel banks. The drainage system installed in the street was designed to a 25 year storm. Mr. Schneider described the suspected source of the flooding and reviewed a history of actions that have been taken to minimize flooding. Staff will provide an update in a couple of weeks and possibly be prepared to propose a project in next year's CIP.

2009-0231

South Road Underpass Flooding

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, will meeting with the Town Manager and the Department of Transportation District II Maintenance Supervisor in about a week regarding a short term solution, resurfacing of the roadway, and a long term solution with respect to the South Road underpass flooding issue. Discussion followed on the signage issue. Councilor Peruzzotti

expressed support for taking immediate action to make the situation safer. Mr. Schneider suggested that the state may not want to bring people in on overtime to change the sign if road conditions change during non-working hours. Discussion followed on installing barriers during flooding and it was noted that the state has its own considerations when closing its roads. The Town Manager noted the upcoming meeting will identify current protocols. If the state is not willing to make any changes, the Town must consider what it is willing to do. After the meeting, the Town Manager will report back to the Town Council.

2009-0319 Transfer of Vehicles to Board of Education

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Watson, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0326 Mystic Streetscape ARRA Funding

Discussed

Mike Murphy, Director of Planning and Development, described the additional funding available for the Mystic Streetscape Project.

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Watson, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0322 Community Garden Report

Discussed

Ben Morse of Parks and Recreation reported on the community garden. He described issues associated with harvesting and using the area for a parking lot. Councilor Monteiro questioned Human Services' reaction to the loss of parking. Mr. Morse stated that Parks and Recreation will need to open those discussions with Human Services again.

2009-0317 Regulations for Parks and Recreation Facilities

Discussed

Jerry Lokken, Manager of Recreation Services, noted that the Parks and Recreation rules and regulations have been updated. The Parks and Recreation Commission has acted on both documents. There have been no changes to the Senior Center rules. Major changes include restricting smoking in areas where kids congregate and eliminating the park monitor.

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0321 Lighthouse Voc-Ed Center Request for Conference Sponsorship

Recommended for a Resolution

The Town has received a letter from the Lighthouse Voc-Ed Center requesting sponsorship for an upcoming conference. The Town Manager stated that ideally this type of request should be done through the budget process when a committee reviews outside agency requests. The Town Manager did note that a one time sponsorship of a conference would not constitute a budget request.

A motion was made by Councilor Monteiro, seconded by Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., to Recommend for Resolution a \$500 sponsorship for the Lighthouse Voc-Ed Center conference.

Mayor Watson noted he would abstain from voting because his wife works with the director of the Lighthouse Voc-Ed Center.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 8 - Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Sheets
Abstain: 1 - Councilor Watson

2009-0254 Town Historian
Not Discussed

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Mayor Streeter distributed a list of Town Council/Mayor appointments that need to be made to Councilors. The Town Manager noted that there are two openings on the SEAT board that should be filled (even on a temporary basis) since Groton is a primary contributor to SEAT.

Mayor Streeter reminded Councilors of the February 6th goalsetting meeting.

Councilors were asked to provide their vacation schedules through the end of April to the Town manager's office.

The Town Manager indicated he would like to brief the Town Council in executive session on pending labor contracts at a special meeting of the Committee of the Whole prior to next week's Town Council meeting.

Councilor Sheets noted that on January 27th there will be a GMTV broadcast of a workshop sponsored by DEP and ICLEI on adaptation to climate change.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, to adjourn the meeting at 10:23 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.